PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 22 Number 6 June 2025

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, June 01, 2025, 6.00AM: Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad. Meeting Point(s): Golden Palace Restaurant, Attapur, 05:30AM; Administrative Block entrance, 06:00AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sudhir Moorti (Mobile: 96522-83335)

Nehru Zoological Park always makes for a rich birding experience with the adjacent green corridor of the National Police Academy and Mir Alam Tank. So please come and enjoy a Sunday outing. The natural habitats in the zoo support species like Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Black-rumped Flameback, Spotted Owlet, Yellow Bittern, Painted Stork, Shikra, Purple Heron, Grey Heron, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Indian Grey Hornbill and many more.

FIELD TRIP-2: Sunday, June 29, 2025, 7.00AM: Yenkathala Grasslands, Hyderabad. Meeting Point(s): NMDC Bus Stop, Masab Tank, 05:30AM; Yenkathala entry point, 07:00AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 97388-40070)

Yenkathala is a mixed forest with scrub, grassland and a lake, and is rich in bird life. Some of the key birds to look out for are Harriers, Eagles, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Tree Pipit, Rain Quail, Jungle Bush Quail, Rock Bush Quail, Barred Buttonquail, Painted Francolin, Baya Weaver, etc.

Both will be half-day trips, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Covid protocols will be followed; please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please carry adequate cash.

FLYING HIGH, FINDING ROOTS
Report: Hyderabad, Feb-Mar 2025

Text: Bukka Harshvardhan; Photos: Laxmi Singh

Red-wattled Lapwing

Few people have the good fortune of marrying a birder. Being a birder must be awesome in its own right. But being married to one comes with its own perks. The foremost being that every walk in the park becomes a quest, a treasure hunt. Even looking outside your window out of boredom can suddenly become a source of excitement, of wonder, of joy. And sometimes, it can help you connect to your roots, your *janmabhoomi*, in ways you never anticipated.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm a teacher, I teach Maths at one of those corporate junior colleges that people wrinkle their noses at, but still keep sending their kids to. A year and a half ago, we shifted from Aramghar X-roads (city outskirts, noisy, dusty) to DD Colony (heart of the city, green, quiet). The move became necessary when I started working at this new Corporate Inter-College. Not that one. The other one.

Anyway, the academic cycle here doesn't leave much time for leisure or hobbies (or, if we're being frank, family). Nevertheless, the February-March period is relatively calmer, because most of the kids are busy preparing for their Boards, and there's a different set of faculty for that. The Oxygen Park, at the edge of OU, then became our go-to hangout place. By 'our' I mean, me, Lux (my wife, Laxmi) and Siri (our daughter). Home is home, but you can't hang out when there are errands to run.

So, we started loafing about the Oxygen Park every chance we got. And lo and behold – It's a birding hotspot! Lux would get ready with the camera and the bird guide, like a soldier getting ready for a reconnaissance mission. I'd get ready with… nothing really. I'd just get out of bed. Then we'd both pack food, water and spare clothes for Siri and off we'd go to explore our (sort of) backyard.

Ashy Prinia

In our first few walks, we mostly saw only the Purple Sunbird and the Red-vented Bulbul; the Ashy Prinia would make an appearance sometimes. Over time though, after knowing the best time and spots, we got better. More surgical, so to speak. And we started first hearing and then spotting the Black-rumped Flameback woodpecker, the Coppersmith Barbet, and in a moment of bliss (for Lux at least), a bunch of Grey Francolins. The little pond of water supports so many birds that Lux would just go mad clicking. No time to observe, she'd say. Ruing the way we decided to buy groceries instead of, you know, binoculars. We'd go home and she'd spend hours sifting through the pictures, zooming into every pixel of colour that stood out. Siri seemed to enjoy the walks too. She finally got space to run and I was happy to run with her.

One fine day, after returning from the walk, and freshly bathed, I was getting ready to go to my campus when Lux, eyes poring into the laptop with concentration, gestured at me to come and sit next to her. Then she pointed at a few Lapwings. I knew they were Lapwings, having learnt to spot them myself. But she said – Observe their beaks. Then shows me a closer view, and I could make out that these looked different – they had a yellow flap above the beak. "Cool!" I say, unable to add anything intelligent. Then she shows me the e-bird app, which lists the Yellow-wattled Lapwing as an uncommon bird. It really felt like a big deal. When did we graduate from common to uncommon birds? Us, in our domestic, domesticated life?

Yellow-wattled Lapwing flock

Over the next few weeks, we got to explore more green areas in and around Hyderabad. Sanjeevaiah Park is awesome. Mrigavani is awesome. Indira Park doubly so, considering how accessible it is. Lux had joined a bird survey group, called Hyderabad Bird Atlas (HBA) led by Deccan Birders and Hyd Birding Pals. All super cool people. The kind of chill group you want to hang out with, who always have something interesting to say. The survey was supposed to culminate in people choosing a spot away from the city, forming teams and surveying it based on their learning so far.

I was pleasantly surprised to see the Makthal *cheruvu* on their list. Makthal is my hometown. Growing up in Mumbai, Makthal was our idea of heaven. The place of month-long summer vacations, the place of grandparents and lots of cousins. Looking back, I think we'd wait the entire year for summer, because of Makthal. It also happens to be the place where my parents now stay, mom being a Govt teacher. Also my grandma, *mamas* and *pinnis*. The whole bunch.

So seeing Makthal in the list felt awesome. And an obvious choice. When we told our relatives about coming to Makthal for birding, they were bemused to say the least. This was the typical city-kid behaviour that they found funny. In their eyes, birding was a hobby at best, but more commonly a distraction from the serious business of money-making. My grandma actually asked us what all the birding will get us. Joy was not an acceptable answer.

Still, off to Makthal we went. Reached post midnight, still woke up early. Our plan was to cover Makthal *cheruvu* upto 9:00AM and then move on to Wadwat *cheruvu* (nearby village, also our ancestral place from dad's side). Makthal *cheruvu* was a pleasure to the eyes. So many ducks! So many *types* of ducks! And a close up of the beautiful, iridescent, Purple Swamphen! Even my cousin A, who accompanied us, was delighted. In between taking care of Siri and listening to A's marriage search woes, we managed to spot a Purple Heron, so many stilts, a pair of Pied Starlings, so many other starlings, and were blessed with a White-throated Kingfisher who chose to come and sit quite close to us.

White-throated Kingfisher

Having clicked to our heart's content, we moved on to Wadwat. We decided to take the unpaved shortcut between villages through the fields, because it was supposedly shorter. In the fields, the car stopped every few meters. And I was more than happy to do so, because that excited sharp set of jabs of the hand accompanied by "Wait wait wait!" means something interesting has been spotted. In one direction, we had the Black-headed Ibis, with a white body contrasting with the bright green of the rice fields; it is still one of my favourite images from the trip.

Black-headed Ibis

A little further, we were greeted by the bright yellow Golden Oriole and ever so many Green Bee-eaters. A few Black Drongos were our constant companions. So many little brown coloured birds were flitting about that Lux couldn't identify. Every few metres her voice would turn into a whisper and she's stare into the distance, pupils constricted, blocking out all of us. It was clear that she was having the time of her life, and therefore, I was having the time of my life. It was at this point that A remarked that he wants what we have. I had to stop and look at him, speechless. Is there a bigger compliment?

We eventually reached Wadwat. By then it was nearly midday. Dad, as expected, had given me a list of things to do while we were there because he probably thought it all a giant waste of time. There was no time for the *cheruvu* but Lux had no complaints. She said she never thought she'd get a chance to explore farm birds with such comfort. Cheers to that. We returned and showed the pictures to as many *pinnis* and *attammas* and cousins as we could. Many they had seen but never these close up pictures. The close-up of the Purple (or Grey-headed) Swamphen held everyone in thrall.

Grey-headed Swamphen

My cousin M, who is generally aloof, even offered to take us to another spot that he had seen. We could see the mood change. Birding wasn't a waste of time. It was something to be appreciated and bragged about. They finally saw it. They finally understood our craze. They wanted to have a slice of it!

The trip got me to look at Makthal differently. How had I never noticed Makthal's natural heritage? Oh I know, because it never came up! Still, if reports are to be believed, the diversity is spiralling down. Pesticides, Insecticides, Deforestation, and the slow disappearance of water bodies are causing species to vanish forever.

I got into the bird-watching game very late. Too late perhaps. But the fact that this late, it is still this rich, means there is so much more we have to lose if we are not careful. I plan to talk to people in authority next time I go there. Don't know if anyone will listen but it will be worth the effort.

Common Pochard & Lesser Whistling-duck

The icing on the cake was when Lux was doing her post-trip picture-gawking, she spotted a kind of duck called a 'Common Pochard'. First sighting for her. Full of excitement, she checked e-bird for confirmation. It wasn't listed for this region. But then she checked her field guides. It was definitely a Pochard. We couldn't believe it. She was the first person on this app to have documented a spotting here. Sure it must have been documented elsewhere. But still, it was a small victory, which felt like a big victory! To mark this achievement, I got the best pics clicked during the trip and got a calendar made out of it. It was my Valentine's gift for her. I surprised even myself. Gifts are her thing, not mine.

So all in all, a trip of a lifetime. Starting at our (sort of) backyard, ending in our village. So many memories, so much joy. Exploring the natural heritage of the place of our childhood memories is a new feeling. Getting to do it with Lux, with whom I have endured family-drama, career-struggles, parenting-struggles, getting to this point of peace after seven years of chaos, is a gift in itself.

Indian Roller

The full list of birds seen during the mentioned period:

LIST OF BIRDS - HYDERABAD REGION					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Ashy Drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*	31	Garganey	*Spatula querquedula*
2	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	32	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
3	Ashy Woodswallow	*Artamus fuscus*	33	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
4	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	34	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*
5	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	35	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*
6	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	36	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*
7	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*	37	Greenish Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochiloides*
8	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	38	Grey Francolin	*Ortygornis pondicerianus*
9	Black-crowned Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	39	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
10	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	40	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
11	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	41	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*
12	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	42	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*
13	Blue Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	43	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
14	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	44	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
15	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*	45	Indian Bushlark	*Plocealauda erythroptera*
16	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*	46	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*
17	Booted Eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*	47	Indian Nightjar	*Caprimulgus asiaticus*
18	Booted Warbler	*Iduna caligata*	48	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*
19	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	49	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*
20	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*	50	Indian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
21	Chestnut-tailed Starling	*Sturnia malabarica*	51	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
22	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	52	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
23	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	53	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
24	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	54	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
25	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	55	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*
26	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	56	Large Grey Babbler	*Argya malcolmi*
27	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	57	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*
28	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*	58	Lesser Whitethroat	*Curruca curruca*
29	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	59	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*
30	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	60	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*

LIST OF BIRDS - HYDERABAD REGION					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
61	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	82	Shikra	*Tachyspiza badia*
62	Little Ringed Plover	*Thinornis dubius*	83	Short-toed Snake Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*
63	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	84	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
64	Medium Egret	*Ardea intermedia*	85	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*
65	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	86	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*
66	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	87	Sykes's Warbler	*Iduna rama*
67	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	88	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
68	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*	89	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
69	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*	90	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
70	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	91	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
71	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*	92	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*
72	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*	93	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*
73	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	94	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Argya affinis*
74	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	95	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*
75	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*	96	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*
76	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*	97	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*
77	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	98	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*
78	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	99	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Ardea coromanda*
79	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	100	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*
80	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	101	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
81	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*	102	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*

LIST OF BIRDS - MAKTHAL & SURROUNDING AREAS					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	23	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*
2	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	24	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
3	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	25	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
4	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	26	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
5	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	27	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
6	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	28	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*
7	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	29	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
8	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	30	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
9	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	31	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
10	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	32	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
11	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	33	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
12	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	34	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*
13	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	35	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
14	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus malabaricus*	36	Rosy Starling	*Pastor roseus*
15	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	37	Indian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
16	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	38	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
17	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	39	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
18	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	40	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
19	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	41	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
20	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	42	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
21	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	43	Common Pochard	*Aythya ferina*
22	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*			

* * *

BIRDING IN SOUTH AFRICA (Part-1)
Trip Report: Cape Town, South Africa, April 16-17, 2024

Text & Photos: Sita Susarla

Cape Spurfowl

This report on the birding visit to South Africa is written in two parts. This (first) part is about birding in the region around Cape Town. Part two will appear in a later issue and will cover the birds and animals of Madikwe Game reserve which is located in the North-western Province of South Africa, close to the border with Botswana. The total bird count in the trip was 141, of which 121 were lifers; animals sighted at Madikwe game reserve were around 25 species.

Birds of Cape Town:

The vegetation of South Africa's Cape Town region is mainly of the type called Fynbos which is a scrubland that is one of the most diverse plant ecosystems in the world. It is a fire-maintained ecosystem, and after each fire, the fynbos is reborn. It is declared as a Biodiversity Hotspot of the world because of the high diversity and endemism of the plants found here.

Cape Town is the Capital of the Western Province of South Africa and is a piece of exotic landscape landmarked by Table Mountain, the Cape Peninsula and the Cape Point. The Cape Peninsula is a mountainous and scenic landform that runs north-south for about thirty kilometres at the extreme south-western tip of the African continent in South Africa. Table Mountain and the city of Cape Town are close to the northern extremity of the same peninsula.

The visit to Cape Town to watch the birds of the region was planned in such a way as to cover the endemic birds of Fynbos along with many other birds at the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden (KNGB) in Cape Town and a couple of nature reserves and beaches extending up to the Cape Point. The guide who took us on the bird tour did his best to cover the various avian hotspots all along from Cape Town to Cape of Good Hope over a period of two days. On the first day we covered the top two bird hotspots, KNGB and Strandfontein birding section (Wetland).

Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden (KNGB):

KNGB is a sprawling garden with diverse plant life, situated at the eastern foot of the iconic Table Mountain. The gardens along with adjacent fynbos and indigenous forest, support diverse bird life.

Olive Thrush

Common Waxbill

Around 32 species were sighted here. The first birds sighted in the garden were the Olive Thrush, Common Waxbill, Bronze Mannekin, Cape Robin-chat, Double-collared Sunbird and Karoo Prinia.

Bronze Mannikin

Cape Robin-chat

The fynbos plant species like Cape Agapanthus, Wild Sorrel, Watsonia, Hooded Pelargonium, Blue Sage, Cape Snowdrop, Red Crassula and Sundews, attract four nectarivores, namely Malachite Sunbird, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, and Cape Sugarbird.

Orange-breasted Sunbird

Malachite Sunbird

The sunbirds were of spectacular colours, and the Malachite Sunbird is quite big with a long tail. It is also an aggressive sunbird. The Cape Sugarbird is one of the six endemic birds of fynbos and has a snake-like flight as it moves from one bush to another, and that is how it is spotted by birders.

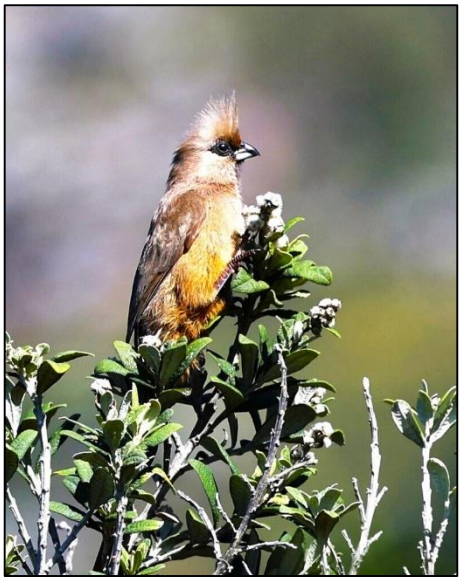
Cape Sugarbird

There were flocks of Common Waxbills and Bronze Mannekins, whose movement resembles that of the Munias back home. Two doves that were sighted were the beautiful Cinnamon Dove, also called as Lemon Dove, and the large Red-eyed Dove with a half-collar on its neck. Some very common birds of the region are the Red-winged Starlings, Cape Bulbul, Cape White-eye, Cape Sparrow, Pied Crow, Blacksmith Lapwing and African Sacred Ibis.

Southern Boubou

The boldest of the birds were the Cape Spurfowl, seen foraging in open patches across the garden. Then came the Southern Boubou, a large black and white Shrike with a cinnamon-coloured belly. It is a very vocal bird with several variations to its call and therefore easy to spot.

A very characteristic bird of the wooded habitat is the brownish-grey Speckled Mousebird. It resembles a mouse while climbing around a tree and hence the name.



Speckled Mousebird

The Sombre Greenbul is a nondescript bird that makes an interesting territorial call that sounds something like ‘Willie, come-and-have-a-fight, scared’! This call gets interspersed with the regular penetrating call ‘Willie willie’.

Sombre Greenbul

The Southern Fiscal, also known as Common Fiscal or Fiscal Shrike, is known to be very aggressive with its prey, impaling them on acacia thorns for later consumption.

Around noon time, our guide began to scan the skies to spot some raptors while tracking the ground birds. A couple of Jackal Buzzards were the only raptors that showed up. With all the birds retired for the morning it was time to wind up and move to Strandfontein.

At the visitor’s centre near the entrance to the Garden, we purchased two pocket guides, one of South African birds, one of the animals of the Game reserve that we were planning to visit and some souvenirs. We started off to Strandfontein wetland that was an hour’s drive away.

Strandfontein birding section:

It is part of The False Bay Nature Reserve, which is a Ramsar site and consists of six parts: Rondevlei Section, Zeekoevlei Section, Strandfontein Birding Section, Pelican Park Section, Slangetjiebos Section, and Zandwolf Coastal Section.

We first went to Rondevlei (round marsh) where we had a light lunch just outside the reserve. The entry into the marsh was restricted and so we strolled around the reserve. In the 30 minutes that we spent here, we came across 19 species of birds.

Red-faced Mousebird

The Red-faced Mousebird, Red-winged Starling, European Starling, Pied Crow, Cape Sparrow, Cape White-eye and Cape Weaver were some of them.

Cape Sparrow

Cape Weaver

We then proceeded to Strandfontein which is one of Cape Town's top birding sites. It is a large wetland with more than 70 species of water birds. The wetland consists of a series of settling ponds that provide open water for waterfowl, with shallow areas for flamingos. The ponds are fringed with reeds that shelter birds like warblers, cisticolas, and other species.

A large number of Barn Swallows were perched on the larger reedbeds. Roads encircling the ponds allow one to use a vehicle as a hide and this way we could observe a wide variety of waterbirds while driving around the pans. It was an amazing birding experience for two reasons. One, there was not a soul around and two, there were plenty of waterbirds, gulls, terns, plovers and a variety of passerines to watch.

White-faced Whistling-duck

Spur-winged Goose

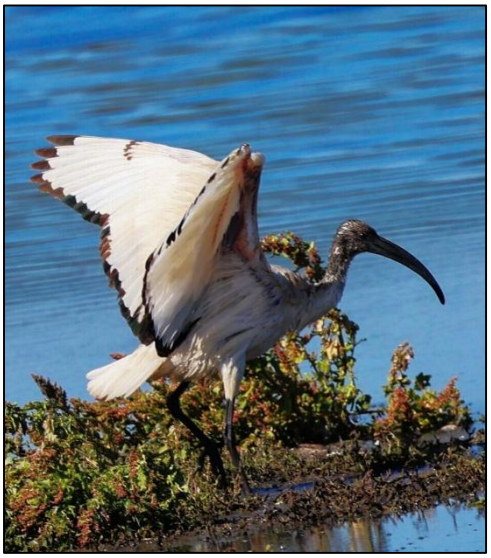
We saw the White-faced Whistling-duck, Spur-winged Goose, Red-billed Duck, Yellow-billed Duck, Cape Teal, Southern Pochard and Red-knobbed Coot.

Red-billed Duck

Yellow-billed Duck

Among the gulls were the Hartlaub Gull, the Grey-hooded Gull and Kelp Gull. The Kelp Gulls are very common across the Cape. The Greater and Lesser Flamingos flying between pans in hues of pink and white were a feast to the eye.

Kelp Gull



African Sacred Ibis

There were two types of Ibis, the African Sacred Ibis that moved around in large flocks, and the Hadada Ibis, which is solitary. The Hadada is named after its three-note call, 'ha-ha-hadeda'.

Hadada Ibis

The Three-banded Plover and Blacksmith Lapwing were very common here. With a total sighting of 51 species, all except a handful being lifers, we wound up for the day.

Blacksmith Lapwing

On Day Two, we travelled to Boulders Beach Penguin colony and Cape of Good Hope Reserve.

Boulder's Beach:

Boulder's Beach is situated in the False Bay area in Simon's Town (also sometimes spelled Simonstown), and is 40km south of Cape Town. The beach is protected from winds and large waves by huge granite boulders hence the name. It is predominantly a habitat for African Penguins.

African Penguin

As we approach the beach, the braying of penguins gets louder and louder, and the only other sound is that of the waves breaking on the rocks. These Penguins are small in size, unlike their Antarctica cousins. Penguins are flightless birds as their wings have evolved into flippers. The flippers and tail support their movement in both land and water.

Cape Cormorant

Apart from the penguins, the beach hosts flocks of Cape Cormorants and Kelp Gulls. There was an African Oystercatcher on a far-off boulder along with a Great Cormorant (White-breasted Cormorant).

African Oystercatcher

On the white sands of the shore were Cape Wagtails and Blacksmith Lapwings. We also spotted three to four Dassies, also called as Rock Hyraxes (Badgers) and one Cape Mongoose. From the beach we walked through a bamboo thicket to another section of the beach, where we spotted Brimstone Canary, Cape Batis, Red-winged Starlings and Cape Sugarbird.

Cape of Good Hope Reserve:
We visited the following sites that fall within the premises of the Cape of Good Hope Reserve:

a) Olifantsbos Bay (‘elephant-bush’)
b) Buffelsfontein (buffalo-spring)
c) Black Rocks
d) Cape of Good Hope and
e) Cape Point

Of these, Olifantsbos had a good number of bird species – 21 species. The waders included three species of plovers – the Three-banded Plover, Kitlitz Plover and White-fronted Plover, besides the African Oystercatcher and some Sanderlings.

Kitlitz Plover

White-fronted Plover

A bird that is closely related to shrikes is the Bokmakierie, a black and yellow bird with a range of calls and the typical ‘bok-bok-mak-kik’ call from which it derives its name.

Bokmakierie

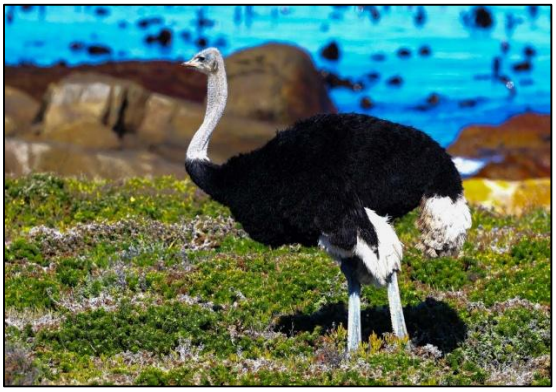
Cape Bunting

The Cape Bunting, Familiar Chat, Fiscal Flycatcher and Cape Crow were the other additions to the checklist.

The Bontebok Antelope was also an interesting sighting. It is one of the rarest antelopes of South Africa, and enjoys protected status in Bontebok National Park.

Bontebok

The Buffelsfontein has a game reserve and a bay called Buffels Bay. The bay is characterised by dune fields, coastal fynbos, and a forest that flanks the long white sands. No new species of birds were sighted here but Eland antelopes were seen grazing around. The Eland is the largest of Africa's antelopes.



Common Ostrich

Our next stop was at Black Rocks Beach to see Ostriches – the only place where Ostriches are found in the open country is in Africa. At Black Rocks, the Ostriches, known to be the largest, heaviest and fastest avian species on the planet, were in their natural setting, foraging gracefully on grass seeds.

The species found in South Africa is the Common Ostrich. There were four of them entertaining the awestruck visitors.

As we moved along the Cape Peninsula, the only birds were the Kelp Gulls and Cape Cormorants. On the sands, we occasionally found Cape Buntings, Three-banded Plovers and Blacksmith Lapwings.

The beaches at Cape of Good Hope are home to Cape Fur Seals. There were many busloads of visitors here as it is a place of historic importance and people were in the queue to take photographs. We drove away from the crowds and at one point on the way back we were informed of the sighting of a Caracal that was last seen in the region three years back.

Caracal

Our guide was keen to show us the Caracal and it took only a few minutes of waiting before it appeared walking on a long and clear path. Caracals are wild cats that are native to both Africa and India. They catch flying birds by making vertical leaps into the air. We took several pictures and videos of the Caracal before moving to the last halt for the day, which is Cape Point.

The Cape Point is a promontory – a raised mass of land that projects into a lowland or a body of water – at the southeast corner of the Cape Peninsula. It was a captivating sight, as you are standing at the edge of the land mass beyond which there is only ocean that extends all the way to Antarctica!

Red-winged Starling

The adjoining cliffs were steep and the vast expanse of blue waters was breath-taking. We were lost in the beauty of the panoramic view until a flock of Red-winged Starlings landed on the shrubs 50 metres below us. The splash of red was awesome and brought us back to the world of Aves. A couple of Cape Buntings were picking up some food before retiring for the day. As we returned to Cape Town, driving through the mesmerising sceneries of cliffs, mountains, bays and beaches we recounted the nearly 60 lifers that we spotted in these two days.

The full list of birds seen during the trip:

BIRDS OF STRANDFORTEIN					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	White-faced Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna viduata*	27	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
2	Fulvous Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna bicolor*	28	Cape Gannet	*Morus capensis*
3	Egyptian Goose	*Alopochen aegyptiaca*	29	Cape Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax capensis*
4	Spur-winged Goose	*Plectropterus gambensis*	30	White-breasted Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus*
5	Cape Shoveler	*Spatula smithii*	31	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
6	Yellow-billed Duck	*Anas undulata*	32	African Sacred Ibis	*Threskiornis aethiopicus*
7	Cape Teal	*Anas capensis*	33	Hadada Ibis	*Bostrychia hagedash*
8	Red-billed Duck	*Anas erythrorhyncha*	34	Western Cattle Egret	*Ardea ibis*
9	Southern Pochard	*Netta erythrophthalma*	35	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
10	Red-eyed Dove	*Streptopelia semitorquata*	36	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
11	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	37	Black-headed Heron	*Ardea melanocephala*
12	Red-knobbed Coot	*Fulica cristata*	38	Great White Pelican	*Pelecanus onocrotalus*
13	African Swamphen	*Porphyrio madagascariensis*	39	African Marsh Harrier	*Circus ranivorus*
14	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	40	Jackal Buzzard	*Buteo rufofuscus*
15	Pied Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*	41	Fork-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus adsimilis*
16	African Oystercatcher	*Haematopus moquini*	42	Pied Crow	*Corvus albus*
17	Three-banded Plover	*Charadrius tricollaris*	43	White-necked Raven	*Corvus albicollis*
18	Blacksmith Lapwing	*Vanellus armatus*	44	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
19	Grey-hooded Gull	*Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus*	45	African Plain Martin	*Riparia paludicola*
20	Hartlaub's Gull	*Chroicocephalus hartlaubii*	46	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
21	Kelp Gull	*Larus dominicanus*	47	European Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*
22	Caspian Tern	*Hydroprogne caspia*	48	Red-winged Starling	*Onychognathus morio*
23	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*	49	Olive Thrush	*Turdus olivaceus*
24	Great Crested Tern	*Thalasseus bergii*	50	Cape Weaver	*Ploceus capensis*
25	Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus roseus*	51	Cape Wagtail	*Motacilla capensis*
26	Lesser Flamingo	*Phoeniconaias minor*			

BIRDS OF RONDEVLEI					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Egyptian Goose	*Alopochen aegyptiaca*	11	Red-faced Mousebird	*Urocolius indicus*
2	Red-eyed Dove	*Streptopelia semitorquata*	12	Acacia Pied Barbet	*Tricholaema leucomelas*
3	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	13	Fork-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus adsimilis*
4	Three-banded Plover	*Charadrius tricollaris*	14	Pied Crow	*Corvus albus*
5	Blacksmith Lapwing	*Vanellus armatus*	15	Cape White-eye	*Zosterops virens*
6	Kelp Gull	*Larus dominicanus*	16	European Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*
7	Cape Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax capensis*	17	Red-winged Starling	*Onychognathus morio*
8	White-breasted Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus*	18	Cape Weaver	*Ploceus capensis*
9	African Sacred Ibis	*Threskiornis aethiopicus*	19	Cape Sparrow	*Passer melanurus*
10	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*			

BIRDS OF KIRSTENBOCH					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Egyptian Goose	*Alopochen aegyptiaca*	17	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
2	Cape Spurfowl	*Pternistis capensis*	18	Sombre Greenbul	*Andropadus importunus*
3	Lemon Dove	*Columba larvata*	19	Cape Bulbul	*Pycnonotus capensis*
4	Red-eyed Dove	*Streptopelia semitorquata*	20	Cape White-eye	*Zosterops virens*
5	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	21	Red-winged Starling	*Onychognathus morio*
6	Blacksmith Lapwing	*Vanellus armatus*	22	Olive Thrush	*Turdus olivaceus*
7	African Sacred Ibis	*Threskiornis aethiopicus*	23	African Dusky Flycatcher	*Muscicapa adusta*
8	Jackal Buzzard	*Buteo rufofuscus*	24	Cape Robin-chat	*Dessonornis caffer*
9	Speckled Mousebird	*Colius striatus*	25	Cape Sugarbird	*Promerops cafer*
10	Acacia Pied Barbet	*Tricholaema leucomelas*	26	Orange-breasted Sunbird	*Anthobaphes violacea*
11	Cape Batis	*Batis capensis*	27	Malachite Sunbird	*Nectarinia famosa*
12	Southern Boubou	*Laniarius ferrugineus*	28	Southern Double-collared Sunbird	*Cinnyris chalybeus*
13	Fork-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus adsimilis*	29	Bronze Mannikin	*Spermestes cucullata*
14	Southern Fiscal	*Lanius collaris*	30	Common Waxbill	*Estrilda astrild*
15	Pied Crow	*Corvus albus*	31	Cape Sparrow	*Passer melanurus*
16	Karoo Prinia	*Prinia maculosa*	32	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	*Passer diffusus*

BIRDS OF BOULDER'S BEACH					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Speckled Pigeon (aka African Rock Pigeon)	*Columba guinea*	7	White-breasted Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus*
2	African Oystercatcher	*Haematopus moquini*	8	Cape Batis	*Batis capensis*
3	Blacksmith Lapwing	*Vanellus armatus*	9	Red-winged Starling	*Onychognathus morio*
4	Kelp Gull	*Larus dominicanus*	10	Cape Sugarbird	*Promerops cafer*
5	African Penguin	*Spheniscus demersus*	11	Cape Wagtail	*Motacilla capensis*
6	Cape Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax capensis*	12	Brimstone Canary	*Crithagra sulphurata*

BIRDS OF OLIPHANTSBOS BEACH					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	African Oystercatcher	*Haematopus moquini*	12	African Sacred Ibis	*Threskiornis aethiopicus*
2	Three-banded Plover	*Charadrius tricollaris*	13	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
3	Blacksmith Lapwing	*Vanellus armatus*	14	Bokmakierie	*Telophorus zeylonus*
4	Kittlitz's Plover	*Anarhynchus pecuarius*	15	Cape Crow	*Corvus capensis*
5	White-fronted Plover	*Charadrius marginatus*	16	Pied Crow	*Corvus albus*
6	Sanderling	*Calidris alba*	17	Fiscal Flycatcher	*Sigelus silens*
7	Kelp Gull	*Larus dominicanus*	18	Cape Robin-chat	*Dessonornis caffer*
8	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*	19	Familiar Chat	*Oenanthe familiaris*
9	Great Crested Tern	*Thalasseus bergii*	20	Cape Wagtail	*Motacilla capensis*
10	Cape Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax capensis*	21	Cape Bunting	*Emberiza capensis*
11	White-breasted Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus*	22	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*

* * *

BRIDGING NATURE AND COMMUNITY THROUGH BIRDS

Trip Report: Mangalajodi, Odisha, January 27, 2025

Text & Photos: N Shiva Kumar

A view of Mangalajodi wetlands

The first light of dawn spills across the Mangalajodi wetlands, setting the vast marshland aglow with shimmering slanting morning light. A symphony of calls rises from the reeds – squawking egrets, gaggling geese, melodious warblers, and the haunting whistles of Pintail ducks – it is one cacophony of confusion. The wetlands, located on the northern fringes of Odisha's Chilika Lake, are a spectacle of nature, a harbour where thousands of birds find sanctuary and where human resilience has reshaped conservation.

Having visited these wonderful wetlands twice in the last ten years I was eager to see the present status of the magnificent Mangalajodi and observe the spread of species in this remote and rustic location. Nearly 70km south-west of Bhubaneswar, Mangalajodi is a paradise for bird lovers, sheltering over 300 species of birds, both resident and migratory. Come winter, its waters turn into a living mosaic of wingbeats, quills, bills and beak-speaks as nearly 200,000 migratory birds arrive from the distant lands of northern hemisphere like Siberia, Mongolia, and the Tibetan Plateau.

Northern Shoveler

From the elegant Northern Shoveler to the dainty looking Northern Pintail and the striking Bar-headed Goose, from the elusive Baillon's Crake and the Yellow Bittern to the vibrant Indian Roller or Common Kingfisher, each bird adds a distinct note to the wetland's orchestral beauty.

Yellow Bittern and Baillon's Crake

Chilika Lake, the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest in the world, spans over 1,100 sq km across the state of Odisha, covering Puri, Khurda, and Ganjam districts. This brackish water lagoon, fed by over 50 rivers and rivulets, is separated from the Bay of Bengal by a narrow sandbar, with seawater ingress through the outer channel near Satapada. The lake's size fluctuates with the seasons, expanding significantly during the monsoon. There are multiple access points to explore its vast water spread — Satapada in the east is famous for its dolphin-watching tours, Barkul in the southwest offers panoramic lake views and boat rides, while Rambha in the south is known for its tranquil islands. Other entry points like Mangalajodi attract birdwatchers, especially during winter when the lake becomes a haven for migratory birds.

Mangalajodi is a small part of Chilika Lake, but vastly different in its makeup. Narrow, reed-lined water channels connect the main Chilika Lake to a freshwater zone on its northern frontier. However, the habitat of Mangalajodi is an amalgamation of shallow freshwater, weeds, reeds, marshes, mud-bunds and tall standing grass – and so, very different from the rest of Chilika Lake. The waters of Mangalajodi are barely two to three feet deep, and a dramatic departure from Chilika Lake's expansive greyscale panorama. Spread across roughly 100 sq km, the marshlands, reed beds and patches of open water create a marvellous mosaic of habitat.

Water Lily

Glorious purple, white and pink water lilies punctuate the scene, their colours blazing against the deep green of aquatic plants and the moss-like hydrilla that floats just beneath the surface.

My first boat safari was not among the most captivating sights as the number of Black-tailed Godwits, a long-distance flier that traverses continents to seek refuge in these tranquil waters, were far and few between.

Black-tailed Godwit

But there were also the Great Egrets, Grey Herons, Purple Herons standing tall among the reeds, and the graceful Pheasant-tailed Jacana, walking effortlessly over floating vegetation.

Purple Heron

The wetlands are also home to an incredible variety of ducks – Garganey, Gadwall, and Common Teal – all dabbling in the shallow waters, creating ripples in the glassy expanse. However, the numbers seemed much lesser than my two previous visits in 2015 and 2019 when I visited with fellow twitchers for a bird binge.

Hunters to Protectors

The Mangalajodi story is not just about beautiful birds; it is about rustic people. Once notorious as a hub for bird poaching, the region has undergone a remarkable transformation. Decades ago, villagers hunted birds to sustain themselves, selling the meat in local markets. The wetlands were their hunting grounds, and the birds and fish in the lake waters were seen as a source of livelihood. For instance, my guide told me that the Northern Pintail is delicious and it does not need spices to make it tasty, a few ingredients are enough to pep up its delight.

However, a turning point came in the early 2000s, when local conservationists, backed by various organizations, began working with the community. They showed the villagers that protecting the birds could bring more sustainable benefits than hunting them. Slowly, the hunters turned into guardians, forming the Mangalajodi Ecotourism Trust. Today, many former poachers are birding guides, boatmen and organisers navigating visitors through the waterways in traditional country boats, their keen eyes spotting rare species amid the floating weeds and submerged reeds.

Oriental Pratincole

Thriving Ecosystem
Beyond its avian wonders, Mangalajodi thrives as a complex wetland ecosystem. Its marshes and mudflats support fish, amphibians, and reptiles, creating a food chain that sustains the diverse bird population. The region's aquatic vegetation, such as Water Hyacinth, Hydrilla and Typha grass, provides resting and nesting grounds for numerous species, while its nutrient-rich waters attract insects and plankton, ensuring a bountiful feast for birds to feed on.

The balance of this ecosystem, however, is fragile. Wetlands across the world are disappearing at an alarming rate due to climate change, pollution, and human encroachment. Fortunately, Mangalajodi stands as a beacon of successful conservation, proving that coexistence between humans and wildlife is not only possible but also rewarding.

The Magic of Mangalajodi
At the end of five boat safaris, each lasting 3 to 4 hours, I had had my fill of birding and bird photography. But the greed in me was still not satisfied and was seeking for more species and some action in birds with their respective hunting skills.

On the last day of my last boat safari, we were fortunate to get a glimpse of the Peregrine Falcon and the Brahminy Kite deploy their aerial hunting acumen.

Peregrine Falcon

Visiting Mangalajodi is an experience of pure wonder. As the sun rises over the wetlands, the morning mist gives way to endless flocks of birds in flight. The water, reflecting a hundred hues of dawn, becomes a canvas for nature's brushstrokes. Drifting silently in a boat, you can witness birds at astonishingly close quarters – unlike most other birding destinations where the creatures are often skittish and scamper.

The tranquillity of the place is interrupted only by the rhythmic splashes of oars, the myriad calls of birds, and the hushed voices of guides whispering stories of transformation – of how these lands have healed and how conservation has given Mangalajodi a new lease of life both for the humans and hundreds of birds.

Whiskered Tern

The Future of Mangalajodi
Despite its success, Mangalajodi faces several challenges. The pressure of tourism, the risks of habitat degradation, and changing water levels due to climatic shifts all pose threats to its delicate ecosystem. Continued community participation, sustainable tourism practices, and stringent conservation efforts are crucial in ensuring that this wetland remains a sanctuary for generations to come.

Mangalajodi is not just a place; it is a testament to nature's resilience and humanity's ability to change. It is a reminder that conservation is not just about protecting species – it is about preserving stories, traditions, and the timeless bond between humans and the wild.

So, the next time you seek an escape into nature, let the call of Mangalajodi guide you. Here, in this magical wetland, birds and humans share a common home, a testament to what is possible when harmony triumphs over destruction.

Web of Pearls – a spider web with water droplets

The full list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	39	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*
2	Bar-headed Goose	*Anser indicus*	40	Oriental Pratincole	*Glareola maldivarum*
3	Greylag Goose	*Anser anser*	41	Brown-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*
4	Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*	42	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*
5	Garganey	*Spatula querquedula*	43	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*
6	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	44	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
7	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	45	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*
8	Eurasian Wigeon	*Mareca penelope*	46	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*
9	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	47	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*
10	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	48	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
11	Green-winged Teal	*Anas carolinensis*	49	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
12	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	50	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*
13	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	51	Black Bittern	*Botaurus flavicollis*
14	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	52	Yellow Bittern	*Botaurus sinensis*
15	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	53	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
16	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	54	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
17	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	55	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Ardea coromanda*
18	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	56	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*
19	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	57	Medium Egret	*Ardea intermedia*
20	Ruddy-breasted Crake	*Zapornia fusca*	58	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
21	Baillon's Crake	*Zapornia pusilla*	59	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
22	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	60	Brahminy Kite	*Haliastur indus*
23	Pacific Golden Plover	*Pluvialis fulva*	61	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*
24	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	62	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
25	Grey-headed Lapwing	*Vanellus cinereus*	63	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*
26	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	64	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
27	Greater Painted-snipe	*Rostratula benghalensis*	65	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*
28	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	66	Black-hooded Oriole	*Oriolus xanthornus*
29	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	67	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
30	Eurasian Curlew	*Numenius arquata*	68	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
31	Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	69	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*
32	Common Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*	70	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*
33	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	71	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
34	Marsh Sandpiper	*Tringa stagnatilis*	72	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*
35	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	73	Indian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
36	Spotted Redshank	*Tringa erythropus*	74	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
37	Ruff	*Calidris pugnax*	75	Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*
38	Temminck's Stint	*Calidris temminckii*	76	Citrine Wagtail	*Motacilla citreola*

* * *

Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Thick-billed Flowerpecker (*Pachyglossa agilis*)

Thick-billed Flowerpecker (Dandeli, Karnataka, October 31, 2024)

Order:	Passeriformes
Family:	Dicaeidae
Genus:	*Pachyglossa*
Species:	*P. agilis*
Size:	10 cm
IUCN Status:	Least Concern

Description & distribution: The Thick-billed Flowerpecker is one of the smaller flowerpeckers of India, and is resident across a wide part of its range, which extends across tropical southern Asia from North-eastern Pakistan and peninsular India east to Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Philippines, and south to Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Borneo and many other parts of that region. The Thick-billed Flowerpecker is dark greyish-brown on the upperparts, and dull greyish buff with diffuse streaking on its underparts. The nominate sub-species, seen in the mainland plains of India, has a more olive rump. The iris is red, bill is bluish and stout – almost finch-like, and visibly heavier than the more common Pale-billed Flowerpecker – and the tail is short. The sexes are similar. Juvenile birds have a pale base to the mandible, white-tipped tail feathers and less streaking on the underparts.

Eleven sub-species are recognized, of which the major ones are *P. a. agilis*, seen in north-eastern Pakistan and peninsular India; *P. a. zeylonica* of Sri Lanka; *P. a. pallescens* of Bangladesh, Myanmar, north Thailand, and north Vietnam; and *P. a. modesta* of south peninsular Thailand, the Malay peninsula and Borneo. Seven other sub-species are distributed across Sumatra, Java, and various islands of the Lesser Sunda Islands of Indonesia, and in some islands of the Philippines.

Some authorities consider three of these subspecies – *P. a. aeruginosa*, *P. a. striatissima* and *P. a. affinis* – to form a separate species, the Striped Flowerpecker.

Habitat & behaviour: Most sub-species of the Thick-billed Flowerpecker are found on mistletoe-laden trees in dense lowland forests, except for the nominate race, found in India, which prefers cultivation, gardens or open forest. Like other flowerpeckers, it feeds mainly on berries and nectar as well as fruits like figs, though it may sometimes take insects; however, unlike other flowerpeckers, it does not swallow the berry but scrapes the skin off on branches where it is foraging, subsequently feeding on the epicarp. As a result, it is a local disperser of the seeds, rather than carrying the seeds and dispersing them elsewhere. Foraging birds often utter a *spick* call while foraging, and the song is a rambling combination of many notes, some of which resemble that of the Ashy Prinia. It tends to jerk its tail from side to side while perched.

Nesting: The Thick-billed Flowerpecker breeds mainly from January to June, and the nest is an oval pouch lined with cobwebs or fine plant fibres, brown in colour and well camouflaged. It is usually suspended from a horizontal branch, and may be 3 to 15 metres up from the ground. Both parents participate in nest-building. The number of eggs in the clutch can vary from 2 to 4, but usually consists of 3 pinkish white eggs, blotched and speckled with brick-red. The mating display is interesting, with the male twittering and fluttering over the female, and the crown feathers being erected, while the white bases of the feathers become visible as a crown stripe.

Local name: The Thick-billed Flowerpecker is very evocatively known as *'Phul sunghani'* or *'Jaadichonch phulsunghani'* in Gujarati, *'Phul chuki'* in Punjabi, and *'Phultocha'* in Marathi. The south Indian languages mostly have a name that is common across flowerpeckers: *'Poon-chittu'* or *'Poon-kothi'* in Tamil, *'Chittu-jitta'* or *'Poopudupu jitta'* in Telugu, and *'Ittakannikuruvi'* in Malayalam.

* * *

Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

(Received on WhatsApp, June 14, 2023)

* * *

For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*